Washington Park Arboretum

BULLETIN

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Washington Park Arboretum Bulletin
Published quarterly by the Arboretum Foundation
for the Washington Park Arboretum

Washington Park Arboretum

The Arboretum is a 230-acre living museum displaying internationally renowned collections of oaks, conifers, camellias, Japanese maples, hollies and a profusion of woody plants from the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Aesthetic enjoyment gracefully co-exists with science in this spectacular urban green space on the shores of Lake Washington. Visitors come to learn, explore, relax or reflect in Seattle's largest public garden.

The Washington Park Arboretum is managed cooperatively by the University of Washington and Seattle Parks and Recreation; the Arboretum Foundation is its major support organization.

Graham Visitors Center

Open 10 AM—4 PM daily;
holidays, NOON—4 PM.
Closed Thanksgiving and the Friday after,
Christmas and New Year's Day.
The Arboretum is accessible by Metro bus #43 from downtown Seattle and the University of Washington campus

Arboretum Foundation

The Arboretum Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1935 to ensure stewardship for the Washington Park Arboretum and to provide horticultural leadership for the region. The Foundation provides funding, volunteer services, membership programs and public information in support of the Arboretum, its plant collections and programs. Volunteers operate the gift shop, conduct major fundraising events, and further their gardening knowledge through study groups and hands-on work in the greenhouse or grounds.

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LEFT: The stone cottage, on Lake Washington Blvd. E. at the southern end of the Arboretum, was designed by the firm of Loveless and Fey in 1936 and constructed with funding provided by both the Work Projects Administration and the University of Washington. This tiny, beloved structure was designed to house employees of the Arboretum or University students. Dan Hinkley, who lived in the cottage for two years in the 1980s, describes its 425 square feet of living space as "somewhat challenging. . . . On the other hand, a marvelous 230-acre landscape awaits outside the back door, and the resident enjoys the unique position of caring for and at times defending a valued Seattle institution."

ON THE COVER: The old hand-colored photograph reproduced here shows the corner of Lake Washington Blvd. E. and East Interlaken. Also designed by the firm of Loveless and Fey, the stone kiosk was built in 1937 and remained in place until it suffered so much vandalism that it was removed in 1954. Courtesy the Washington Park Arboretum Horticultural Maintenance Crew.

Splendid Spring Opportunities

Spring always brings limitless ways to enjoy the beauty of Washington Park Arboretum and its plant treasures.

This spring is especially exciting, as Seattle's Olmsted centennial comes to the Arboretum in the form of this special issue of the Bulletin as well as a guided tour of Azalea Way, the centerpiece of the Olmsted firm's 1930s-era plan for Seattle's then-new arboretum. Join us and our friends from the Seattle Parks Foundation on Saturday, May 17, at 10 a.m.

While at the Arboretum, be sure to see the Signature Bed at the Graham Visitors Center (see page three of this Bulletin). There, you'll find an Olmsted-inspired garden designed and installed by Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks (FSOP), one of the sponsors of the National Association for Olmsted Parks' annual conference to be held in Seattle April 30–May 4, 2003. For regularly updated conference information please see www.olmsted.org/seattle2003. For more about additional events associated with Seattle's Olmsted Legacy centennial celebration, call FSOP at the numbers listed at the bottom of page four.

Have you ever noticed the many photographers at work in the Arboretum capturing images of plants, landscapes and visitors? The Arboretum is certainly a photographer's paradise, offering ever-changing subject matter with countless surprises and creative opportunities. To provide photographers with a chance to showcase their Arboretum work, the Arboretum Foundation presents a photo contest with support from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Participation by both professionals and amateurs is welcome. See page 30 for more information.

Azalea Way was designed by James F. Dawson, whose plans for this much-appreciated part of the Arboretum were underwritten by the Seattle Garden Club. Planting began in 1939, overseen by Arboretum Director Dr. John Hanley, and included more than 80 species and varieties of azaleas and 18 varieties of cherries. Since many of these plants are nearing the end of their life spans, Azalea Way is included among areas of master plan renovation.

While planning your spring and summer gardening, don't forget the Arboretum Foundation's marvelous plant sales. Early Bloomers (April 12) and FlorAbundance (April 26 and 27) return this year with their usual magnificent plant selections. New for 2003 is the Summer Solstice Sale, presented by the Foundation's Plant Donations volunteers, featuring drought-tolerant plants and a selection of delightful container gardens.

Take time to celebrate! Spring, Seattle's Olmsted Legacy, and the many wonders of Washington Park Arboretum. We look forward to seeing you.

Deborah Andrews

Deborah Andrews, Executive Director,
Arboretum Foundation

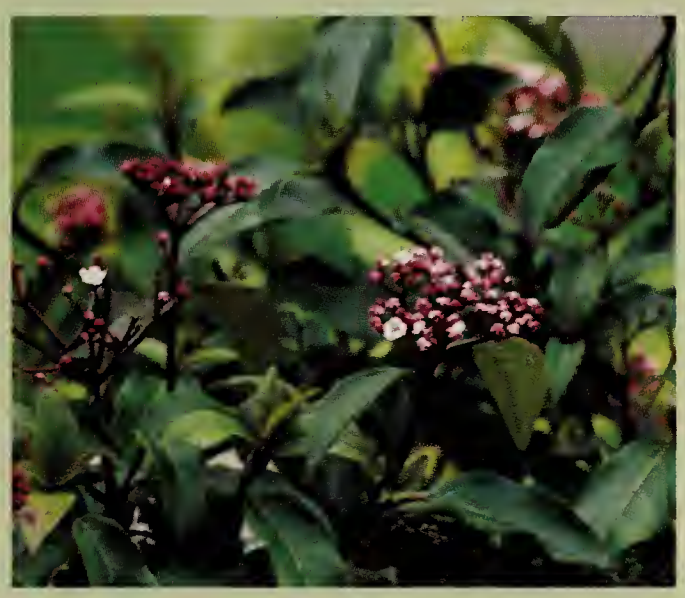
COMBINATIONS UNLOCKED

The Whys & Wherefores of Favorite Plant Combinations

5: Olmsted "Signature Plants" in the Arboretum's Signature Bed

By Douglas E. Jackson

I think you might like to celebrate this year's Seattle Olmsted Legacy centennial by creating an Olmsted corner in your own garden? Then come on over to the Arboretum's Graham Visitors Center and take a good look at the Signature Bed. This



year, the basic layout, plant selection and combinations are intended to generate interest in the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm's designs for Seattle parks, private residential gardens, and ultimately, the beginning of Washington Park Arboretum.

ABOVE: *Viburnum tinus* 'Spring Bouquet': Growing four to six feet tall, this selection has slightly smaller leaves than the species and similar dark pink buds opening to lightly fragrant flowers followed by metallic blue fruit.

BELOW: The Northwest native, salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) was a favorite Olmsted groundcover, for it survives well even in dry shade, producing pink-tinged, white flowers and fruit appreciated by birds.

In place for a year, the goal of each Signature Bed is "to create a seasonal display with a strong educational component—using common plants in unusual ways, the display of several themes, or the display of unusual plants."

This year, the Signature Bed was designed by the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks (FSOP) to celebrate the centennial of the Olmsted Brothers firm's initial work in Seattle and the remarkable Olmsted legacy with which Seattle has been blessed. The purpose of FSOP is "to promote awareness, enjoyment and care of our Olmsted parks and landscapes, both public and private."

Viburnum plicatum f. *tomentosum* (Double-file viburnum) forms a large, layered shrub with an almost horizontal branch structure. Its leaves turn red in fall, and it pleases birds with its black fruit.

The layout of the Signature Bed was developed to suggest a portion of a typical planting area in one of the Seattle parks designed by the Olmsted firm. While the bed's design is rather casual, the majority of the plant material used in this raised garden is the same as that used by the Olmsted Brothers in many of the earliest parks they planned.

As were Olmsted parks, this bed was designed to provide year-round interest, featuring unusual combinations of color (in bark, foliage and bloom), leaf shape and texture. Although the dimensions of the Signature Bed are somewhat restrictive, it is hoped that the layering (small-to-medium-to-tall) of plants used by the Olmsted Brothers is evident. The bed also includes a greater variety of plants than the Olmsteds would have chosen for such a small space.

"Signature plants" used by the Olmsteds include cotoneasters, viburnums, rhododendrons, spireas, dogwoods, and the Northwest natives, salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) and evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*). Although the Signature Bed planting includes more than 25 species and varieties, an Olmsted garden might feature just a few selections for a successful combination of color, texture and flower and to yield interest year-round.

Among the shrubs planted in the bed, the home gardener might plant a garden in red barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* f. *atropurpurea*), oak-leaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia* 'Flemygea,' also known as Snow Queen), and doublefile viburnum (*Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Mariesii') or one of the spring-flowering rhododendrons and azaleas, such as 'The Honorable Jean Marie de Montague,' 'Everest' or 'Hino Crimson.' Adding winterberry (*Ilex verticillata* 'Winter Red') or red-twig osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) would contribute winter interest. Even one or two of these shrubs underplanted with bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*) would paint a simple, elegant picture.

A flier listing all of the plants used in the Signature Bed is available in the Graham Visitors Center. Plants and materials were generously donated by Julius Rosso and Pacific Plants Wholesale Nurseries, Teufel Landscape Nursery, Washington Mutual Companies, Cedar Grove Compost, Ragen & Associates, and Classic Nursery & Landscape Company.

In addition to the Arboretum Signature Bed, new plantings at the entrance to Volunteer Park may interest home gardeners thinking about creating an Olmsted-inspired design. With thoughtful planning, plants like those used by the Olmsted Brothers might become your own "signature plants." ~

Douglas E. Jackson, who designed this year's Signature Bed, is a landscape architect who is the current president of the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks (FSOP). He may be reached at 206-282-6182. For further information about FSOP call 206-332-9915 or 206-250-5859.

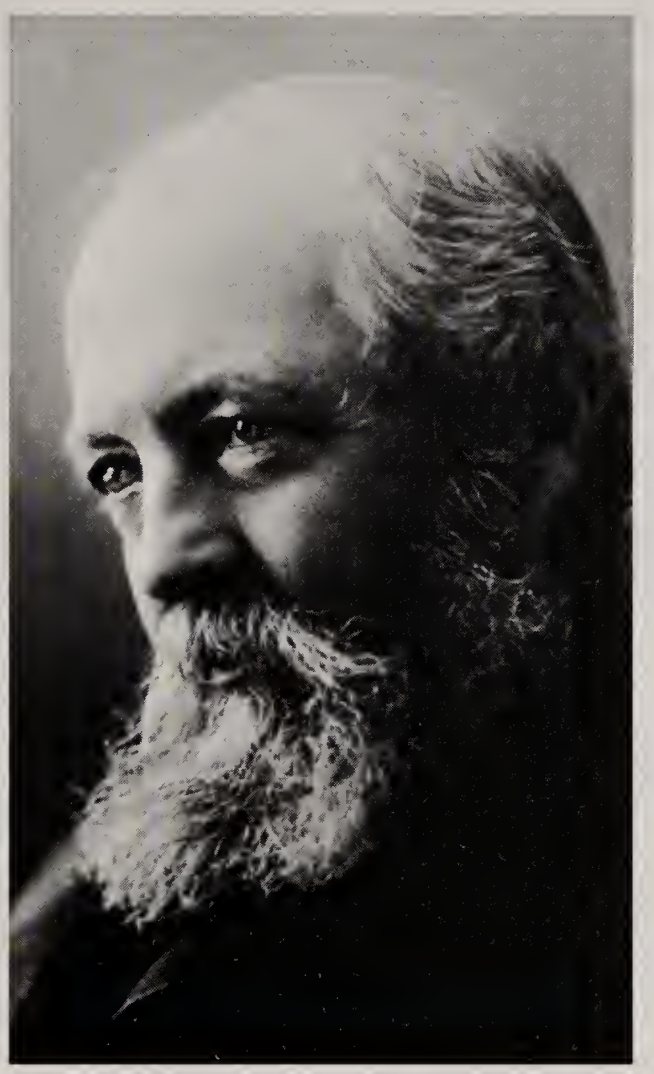
HORT 101

What do you know about FLO?

By Marty Wingate

Before he was called the "father of landscape architecture," Frederick Law Olmsted, or "FLO," (1822-1903) was called "father" by two sons. Fortunately, they learned from him and then took his ideas and ran with them, well into the 20th century.

Sons John (John Charles) and Rick (Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.) followed their father into the landscape design business, but not because their father had done the same a generation earlier. Olmsted had wandered far from his father's business in dry goods and dabbled in many professions. Instead of working his way up the ladder, he genuinely looked for something that would capture his interest for more than a year, and, in the process, he tried surveying, seafaring, publishing, writing, farming (in a gentlemanly sort of way), and managing a California mining operation. It could be said that all those pursuits, in various ways, prepared him for the career that would make him famous.



Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.

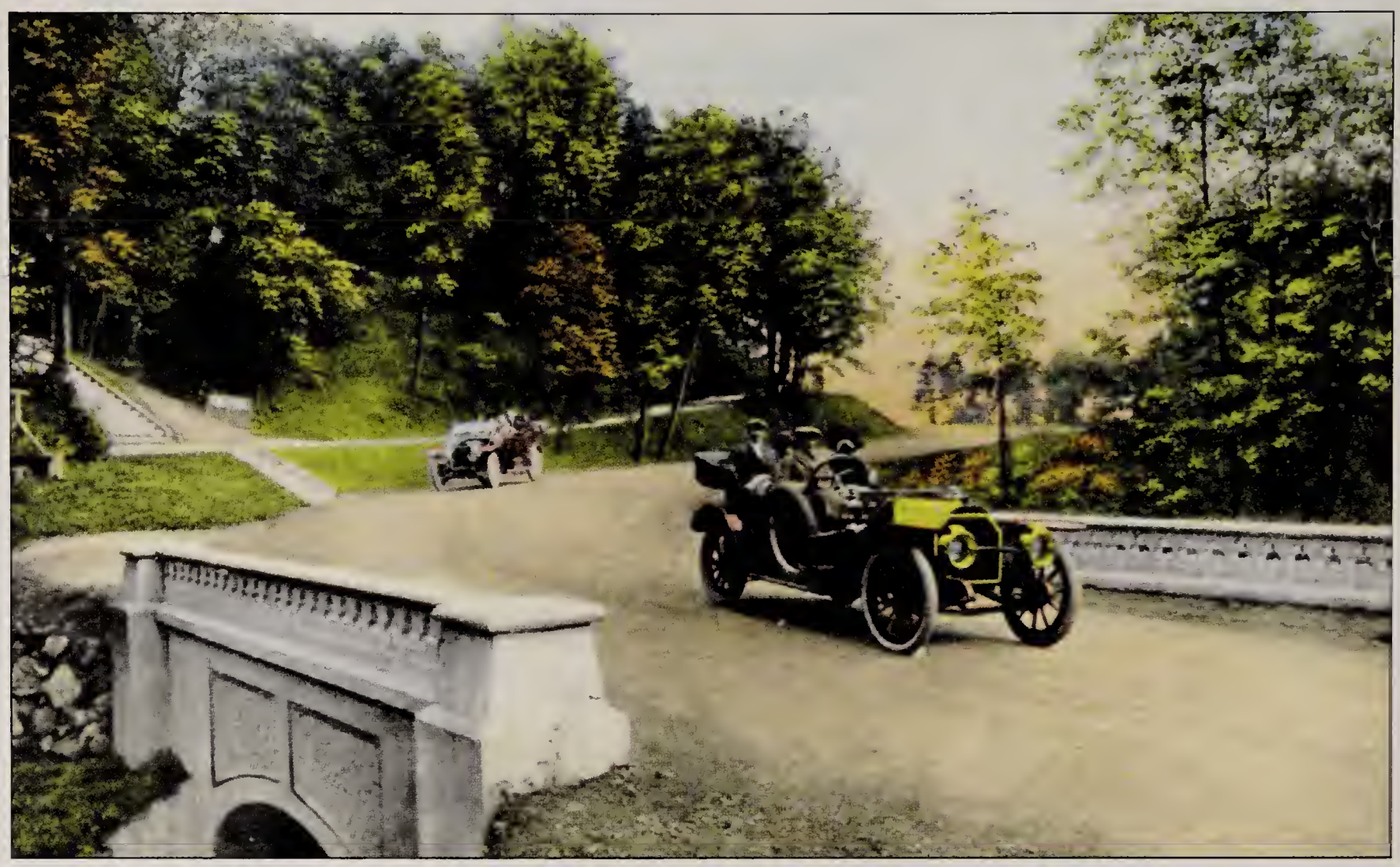
COURTESY NPS FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

The idea of modern farming was especially intriguing to FLO. His mentor, George Geddes, became a source of information and a sounding board for new farming ideas in the mid-1840s, as Olmsted focused his interest on the outdoor realm. FLO's opinions also were heavily affected by Andrew Jackson Downing, a designer and popular figure at the time, whose influence is compared to today's style movers-and-shakers Terrance Conran in Britain and Martha Stewart in the United States by author Witold Rybczynski in "A Clearing in the Distance," (reviewed on page 31).

The education that FLO undertook on his way to establishing landscape architecture as a force in city planning included travel, as it did for many young men of the 19th century. But instead of a grand tour of Europe, FLO knew what he wanted to see and made a beeline for the grand parks and public spaces of England and on the continent. Olmsted owed much of his inspiration to Birkenhead Park in Liverpool, England, where he saw natural landscape used to its best advantage—swamps turned into lakes, paths and drives created to invite the public to wander in and around,

continues on page 22

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF SEATTLE'S OLMSTED PARKS.



The Olmsteds and Seattle's Parks System: A Brief Perspective

BY ARTHUR LEE JACOBSON

The current celebration of the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm's work in Seattle may surprise those Seattle residents having no idea the prestigious East Coast firm had such considerable impact on the design of the city's parks and boulevards. On the other hand, others may mistakenly credit the Olmsted firm with creating every aspect of the system as we know it today.

In fact, although some would find this over-simplified, the history of Seattle's parks can be divided into four stages, each with its own distinctive traits:

1. Beginnings and pre-Olmsted years (1884–1903).
2. Olmsted years (1903 until the mid-Depression).
3. Depression and Work Projects Administration (WPA) years.
4. Post-Depression to the present day.

Beginnings

In the early years, Seattle's parks were nearly all privately owned and were often tied in with real estate business. In order to sell home lots, wealthy realtors would build

ABOVE: A Sunday drive along the boulevard system of Frink Park. This connected system of Seattle parks and parkways was designed by John C. Olmsted in 1907.

cable-car lines with attractive pleasure grounds (parks) at the end of the line. This was big business indeed. Such activity flourished especially in the area stretching from Madison Park to Leschi. A number of such parks, as well as others not at all associated with the pecuniary motives of realtors, then were either generously donated or sold to the city. Kinnear Park was among the first, becoming city-owned in 1889 at a cost of one dollar.

Thus, even before the Olmsted work began, a solid and diverse "system" of parks had been established, including Broadway Reservoir, Denny, Denny-Blaine, Howell, Kinnear, Leschi, Madison, Observatory, Pioneer Square, Ravenna, Rodgers, Salmon Bay, Viretta, Volunteer, Washington and Woodland parks.

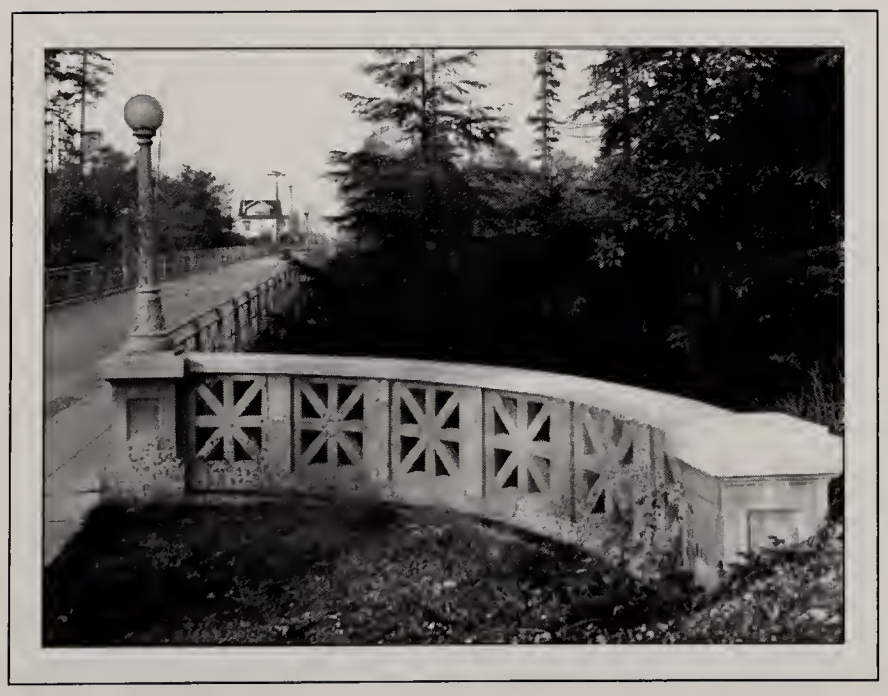
Some of these parks were still privately owned, but all were open to the public; some also had other names and have since been renamed. The Olmsteds did not single-handedly create our park system; they added to it and enhanced it.

In attempting to discover an accurate, early history of Seattle's parks, we find that although extant records and documentation are not scarce, they are incomplete and scattered. Currently, the greater part of the historical and contemporary data relating to our parks is filed in the Seattle Municipal Archives. This information was organized by the late Don Sherwood, dedicated and consummate parks historian. A typical park file contains that park's history, maps, newspaper clippings, pictures, drawings, plans, inventories, letters, and photocopies of relevant passages from official Parks Department documents.

The annual reports issued by the Board of Park Commissioners, beginning in 1884, provide another source of early park information. For example, the 1893 edition is heavily devoted to the first of our parks' nurseries—Volunteer Park, at that time called City Park. A complete inventory of the nursery stock is printed in the report. The quantities and dollar value of each kind of plant are supplied. The inventory of trees in the nursery includes 12,000 madronas (*Arbutus menziesii*), 4,950 European larches (*Larix decidua*), 3,670 big-leaf maples (*Acer macrophyllum*) and 3,190 digger pines (*Pinus sabiniana*).

The ten most numerous kinds of trees, although supplying close to 20,000 individual plants, amounted to less than one-third of the total tree population in the nursery! Well over

Details, such as these distinctive lampposts, comfortable paths and decorative walls and railings, make Olmsted parks recognizable. Many of these attractive, architectural details still grace Seattle's parks and boulevards.



COURTESY SEATTLE PARKS & RECREATION/CITY ARCHIVES

two hundred kinds of trees were present. Nor were shrubs lacking—there were 25 kinds of spirea, 17 privets, 16 mock oranges, 14 lilacs, etc.

Why did the fledgling nursery boast such an enormous, impressive and unusually varied stock since, at the time, there were so few city-owned parks in which to use the plants? It was due largely to the indefatigable seed exchanges and boundless energy displayed by Edward O. Schwagerl, then the Park Department Superintendent, Landscape Architect and Engineer. He boldly instigated seed exchanges with such renowned institutions as the Arnold Arboretum in Massachusetts, Kew Gardens in England, the Smithsonian Institute and National Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C., the French Commission of Horticulture under M. L. de Vilmorin, and several park departments in the eastern United States. He offered to trade our native Northwest seeds for anything exotic. As a result of his early efforts, our parks were planted with all manner of choice plants.

By 1892, Schwagerl had also drawn up a plan for the Seattle parks system including features later adopted by the Olmsteds. His proposal, largely unrealized at the time, included an elaborate plan for boulevards and bike paths with hopes to anchor the city's parks system with then outlying parks at Sand Point, the Bailey Peninsula (now Seward Park), Lighthouse Point (now Discovery Park), and part of Alki Point, currently privately owned.

Olmsted Years

The Olmsted Brothers firm, founded by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. was, at the turn of the 20th century, a nationally recognized and prestigious landscape architectural firm located in Brookline, Massachusetts.

In 1902 negotiations began with the Olmsted Brothers firm, and in April 1903, John Charles Olmsted and his assistant Percy R. Jones arrived in Seattle—the first of many visits. A master plan, incorporating existing parks, was completed in June; it was approved by the city council in October. Proposed boulevards ensured that various, scattered, existing parks would be related harmoniously to one another, rather than being isolated and unconnected units. The farsighted boulevard/connection plan (pre-conceived by Schwagerl) was polished with brilliant finesse by these artists. The firm was then asked, in 1904, to design the boulevard through Washington Park.

The basic principles the Olmsted firm followed included: first, giving each park individual treatment and identity particularly suited to its existing natural state and intended uses; second, harmonizing introduced plantings and structures with the existing native plant growth and topography, so as to create a beautiful, subtle blend; third, using naturalistic curving paths and boulevards attuned to human traffic as well as using simple, wooden structures (ornate concrete work was only used where necessary); and fourth, using virtually any plant judged worthwhile, whether or not it was native, exotic, weedy or readily available.

Relatively few of their planting lists are extant and/or are easily accessible. Green Lake, a remarkably well-documented park in this respect, offers a revealing look at the kinds of plants proposed. The plants on the February 1912 list and the plants currently growing at Green Lake are quite different. Changes over the years have been so all-encompassing that one could use the Green Lake planting list at the Seattle Center with about equal accuracy! It would be difficult indeed to overestimate the many changes that have taken place between what the Olmsteds originally planned and what we see today, especially with regard to plants. For even the immediate implementation of the Olmsted plans was fraught with unavoidable substitutions—what the Olmsteds proposed was often different from what was actually

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF SEATTLE'S OLMSTED PARKS.

ordered, let alone what was received intact and properly installed.

Instead of moaning and groaning over the substitutions, we should focus on the lasting achievements of these Olmsted designs. The Olmsted Brothers firm defined the essential grid and style of Seattle's pre-Depression park system, employing its ample talent to make truly beautiful landscapes with practical designs. The firm's distinctive touch is reflected here not only in our parks, but also in considerable non-municipal work engaged in during repeated short trips to Seattle. Some of these private schools, gardens and estates are far better examples of untampered Olmsted design than are any of our ever-evolving parks.

With one exception, the Great Depression of the thirties sadly put an end to the Olmsted work on Seattle's parks. In March 1935, the Seattle Garden Club raised $3,000 to hire the firm to create a master plan for the University of Washington Arboretum, now the Washington Park Arboretum. (See the article beginning on page 16 of this issue.)

Depression and Work Projects Administration Years

The atmosphere and character of a typical Seattle park, as we experience it today, is largely the fruit of the Depression—more specifically of the WPA work done in the parks, a "face lift" of the Olmsted work. There was scarcely any piece of park or public property that did not benefit from federal dollars. These years brought to city parks the vast system of quaint brick restrooms, tennis courts, drinking fountains, retaining walls,

ABOVE: "Seattle possesses extraordinary landscape advantages in having a great abundance and variety of water views and views of wooded hills and distant mountains and snow-capped peaks," John C. Olmsted wrote Seattle Park Commissioners in 1903. "In designing a system of parks and parkways the primary aim should be to secure and preserve . . . as much as possible of these advantages of water and mountain views and of woodlands, well distributed and conveniently located." The city adopted Olmsted's parkway and parks plan later in 1903.

viaducts, and cleared paths, as well as the construction of Aurora Avenue through Woodland Park. The landscaping of all of these projects also took place at this time.

Wholesale plantings of conifers and flowering shrubs were carried out, with the plants largely obtained from the Washington Park nursery. Most of the non-native conifers seen in city parks today were planted on a scale of dozens and hundreds. Trees, such as Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Veitch and Momi firs (*Abies veitchii* and *Abies firma*), incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*), blue spruces, redwoods and sawara cypress (*Chamaecyparis pisifera*) were extensively used. Poplars and cherry trees were also widely planted. It was as if there was a mandate to plant trees, but more realistically, there was probably a huge effort to relieve an enormous nursery surplus and to employ workers desperate for jobs. It was a much greater undertaking than the massive municipal street-tree planting of the 1970s.

Post-Depression Years

Since the Depression there have been many changes. Among the most important, new parks have been developed at a rapid rate, generally with a style strikingly different from that of the Olmsted parks. There are five basic reasons for the differences including, first, the type of land that is being converted into parks; second, differences in modern park usage; third, the prohibitive cost of park design, implementation, administration, supplies and labor; fourth, the need to protect against vandalism; and fifth, the effects of air pollution on plants. The variety of plants used has decreased, and those most often used are the standards—London planes, sweetgums, red maples, English ivy (now being removed) and St. John's wort. An exception is Freeway Park, which was planted with more diversity including some eye-catching varieties. Park maintenance has also changed. The relatively high cost of personnel has resulted in fewer employees and increased mechanization. The tasks of lawn-mowing, weeding and leaf-raking have been superseded by the need to repair the steadily crumbling Depression structures, and by the fact that aging, big trees require more care than young trees. As a partial relief to park maintenance, the Adopt-a-Park program has been established.

Passive recreation and casual athletics are no longer the only park activities. Now the Department of Parks and Recreation has expanded to cover all kinds of additional activities—in short, sports use has equaled traditional park usage in importance.

Since 1984, Seattle parks have been changed by some novel programs and activities, not to mention the significant upgrading

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of the Parks Department itself. Over 300 acres of new park lands have been added, such as Kubota Gardens Park. Volunteer organizations, such as Re-Tree Ballard, TREEmendous Seattle, and the Green Lake Park Alliance have come and gone, leaving their mark. Similar groups persist, such as the Thornton Creek Alliance and the Friends of Parks groups.

The Parks Department has developed a wildlife and habitat management plan. The use of compost and wood chips as mulch has increased; pesticide use has decreased. Programs exist to replace ivy with native groundcovers. A superb Olmsted Interpretive Exhibit has been installed at the top of Volunteer Park's water tower. And two books have highlighted many splendid park trees: "Trees of Seattle" (1989) and "Champion Trees of Washington State" (1996).

After all these years, it is clear that the average park (including the Arboretum), might be expected to contain various elements of these four historical stages—each park being predominantly influenced by one stage or another. The pre-Olmsted years (stage one) are well represented by some excellent old trees at Kinnear and Leschi parks. The Olmsted influence (stage two) may be seen in the relatively pure, albeit overgrown, luxuriance of Lakeview Park and in the sinuous boulevard below it. Extensive examples and rich remnants of the Depression (stage three) are easily seen throughout the city, but perhaps the Woodland Park/Aurora Avenue stretch of landscaping exists in the purest state. The time since the Depression (stage four) has no single recognizable style—only diversity. Seattle's parks are best viewed as continually evolving, much as do neighborhoods or even cities as a whole—with certain changes for the better, others for the worse. Natural growth of vigorous plants, such as ivy, coincide with the gradual demise of weaker ones, such as our native orchids. Meanwhile, man-made structures also need continual upkeep.

Thus, we cannot, after all these active years, call a given park today "an Olmsted park." We can only say, "this was an Olmsted park," and mention the year its design was carried out.

No matter how we choose to categorize Seattle's parks, most of us are pleased with the system, or at least with an individual favorite park, realizing what a treasure we possess in these free, public and natural places in the city.

A earlier version of this article was published in the Winter 1984 issue of the Bulletin. Arthur Lee Jacobson is the author of the recently published "Wild Plants of Greater Seattle," available in the Arboretum gift shop or by contacting Jacobson at 206-328-8733. ~

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Olmsted Redux

By Holly M. Redell

Through the graceful vision of John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., we continue to enjoy in Seattle exquisite spaces reflecting the finest principles of landscape design. The Olmsted firm, led by step-brothers John Charles and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., designed, influenced, or recommended for Seattle more than 68 park spaces and 18 boulevards. Of the original plan, 17 parks and 14 boulevards were built. Most of the spaces are close renditions of what the designers intended; and a small number have incorporated elements of the original designs.

The anniversary is the spark for restorations, events and a publication commemorating the Olmsted legacy in Seattle. The restoration projects are in Volunteer Park, the only Seattle park to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Built in the 1900s, Volunteer Park is a jewel of the Seattle park system, just as its designers intended. Two major projects, both funded with leadership from the Seattle Parks Foundation, will fulfill key elements of the initial design.

Entrance Garden at Fourteenth Avenue (completed): This is the most popular entrance for the 50,000 people who visit Volunteer Park each year. The garden area at this south entrance was designed by the Olmsteds but was either never built or never maintained and, instead, a bare area greeted guests. Now, this small and lovely garden is planted with glossy abelia (*Abelia* x *grandiflora* 'Sherwoodii'),

Pools, ponds and lakes were important in many Olmsted park designs. Brooklyn's Prospect Park, designed by Olmsted Sr. and Calvert Vaux, included rustic shelters, which provided destination points for rowboats on Prospect Lake.

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF SEATTLE'S OLMSTED PARKS.

COURTESY SEATTLE PARKS & RECREATION/CITY ARCHIVES

Volunteer Park Reservoir and Gardens 1926.
Seattle Municipal Archives Photograph Collection Item 2509

Japanese barberry, (*Berberis thumbergii*), longleaf mahonia (*Mahonia nervosa*), and memorial rose (*Rosa wichurana*).

The new garden was landscaped, planted and will be tended by Seattle Parks and Recreation. The restoration was made possible through Pro Parks levy dollars and private fundraising.

Lily Pond Pools: The most ambitious and visible of the restorations, the Lily Pond Pools, are not only a key element of the Volunteer Park design but are also reminiscent of pools and ponds in Olmsted designs in other parks, a symbolic connection from coast to coast. The pool basins are between the Seattle Asian Art Museum and the park reservoir, on either side and slightly below the Isamu Noguchi sculpture "The Black Sun."

The restoration will include repair of the water-circulating system and a leak in one pool, as well as complete restoration of both pools and their concrete edges. In fact, a new engineering design for the water circulation system will be created. The restoration, expected to cost $200,000, should be complete by the end of 2003.

Benches: In addition to these two major

projects, a number of the existing benches in the park will be replaced with historic Olmsted-inspired benches, evoking images of strolls or carriage rides through the park in old-time dress and of long, cool drinks of lemonade.

Monthly walking tours of Olmsted parks began in January and continue, on the third Saturday of each month throughout the year. A full schedule is available at the Seattle Parks Foundation web site: www.seattleparksfoundation.org. Local parks enthusiasts, the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks and Seattle Parks and Recreation are providing tour leaders.

Finally, the Friends of the Conservatory in Volunteer Park are publishing "A Guide to Olmsted Landscapes in Seattle/King County" through a grant from King County's Landmarks & Heritage Commission. The guide will be available in several places, including the new resource center/gift shop in the Conservatory in Volunteer Park and the Arboretum visitors center. Call 206-322-4112 for additional locations and more information. ~

Holly Redell is the Development Director of Seattle's Pacific Science Center and is on the board of the Friends of the Conservatory.

Approaching Thudam

I had wanted to see Thudam for nearly two decades after having first read of this village in Roy Lancaster's classic *Plant Collecting in Nepal*. The "one-day trek" from our previous campsite to this trading post on the Thibetan frontier had turned into two days and then became three days. The track was rough, in stretches turning back on itself while transmuting into my own personal and hideous nightmare of vertigo; there was no forgiveness if we slipped or stumbled.

Ultimately, fortunately in a controlled dive, we dropped to the comparatively level ground of the river valley, bringing me to the absolute pleasures of the moment. I was surrounded by those plants, at last, that we had come to see. At dusk, we made camp in a mossy, boulder-strewn depression amidst birches and Rhododendrons with a waterfall adding a further splash of contentedness to the evening outside our tents.

In the morning we walked towards Thudam, which we would make by lunch (I was told, again) but we walked slowly and collected seed of many plant species. Here grew *Acer caudatum*, creating splendid specimens to 35 ft. with stems clad with papery shards of amber-colored bark. So impressive were these effects that frequently I stopped to ascertain that indeed this was a maple that I was seeing.

By lunch, I had at long last been greeted by the dogs and denizens of Thudam, and was invited inside for a short rest and a mug of salty tea. As I sat in the smoky darkness of my host's home, I thought of Roy Lancaster and his comrades who had been in this village thirty-one years prior – perhaps in this very home. And I thought of that maple, yet another good species I have had the privilege to observe in the wild.

Trees

Acer caudatifolium DJHT 99018 z7 d2" 03967 $15.00
This rare species of maple, in cultivation, possesses narrow unlobed leaves to 4" in length along a rounded crown to 30 ft., transforming to spectacular tints of red and orange in autumn. One of numerous maple species we encountered in the N.C. highlands of Taiwan at over 6500' in the autumn of 1999, I count this species as one of the most spectacular I have witnessed in autumn finery. My collections from slightly below Tayuling. *Aceraceae* Taiwan

Acer circinatum z5 d2" 00037 $10.00
Our native and beloved Vine Maple, with striking green stems formatted as a multi-stemmed large shrub or small tree, and rounded foliage with 7-11 lobes turning to fiery reds and oranges in autumn. This is closely related to the Japanese Maple, *A. palmatum*, and certainly superficially similar to *A. japonicum* – the only such relative to occur outside of Asia. Full sun or partial shade in any well-drained soil. 15 ft. *Aceraceae* NW U. S.

Acer cissifolium z5 d2" 03935 $8.00
This wide spreading species bears deeply cut, highly textural, trifoliate leaves which color intensely in autumn in shades of orange and red. A distinctive species, rare in cultivation and very handsome in our bright woodland, producing a 25 ft. x 25 ft. flat-topped tree in relatively short order, in any well-drained soil. *Aceraceae* Japan

Acer davidii DJHC 0591 00040 $12.00
I have had the opportunity to see this, one of the f ... species, on numerous occasions in W. China, though never before so cl ... namesake, the French missionary, Armand David. It was above ... ioned his religion while exuberantly botanizing the regio ... that gave rise to these plants. Very unlike what I co these individuals were extremely large, to 6" leathery texture. The bark of this species off preserved by planting in areas of complete t ft.

Acer griseum
Paperbark Maple. The aristocrat of the beautiful, crispy shags of cinnamon-co' underside, hence its specific epithet, Truly a sight to behold in the winter 25 ft., in full sun or light shade and sun.

Acer japonicum 'Aconiti'
Not only does this sensational a foliage offered by any maple s orange and yellow tints in au well, with rather large spray blossoms. Ultimately to 20

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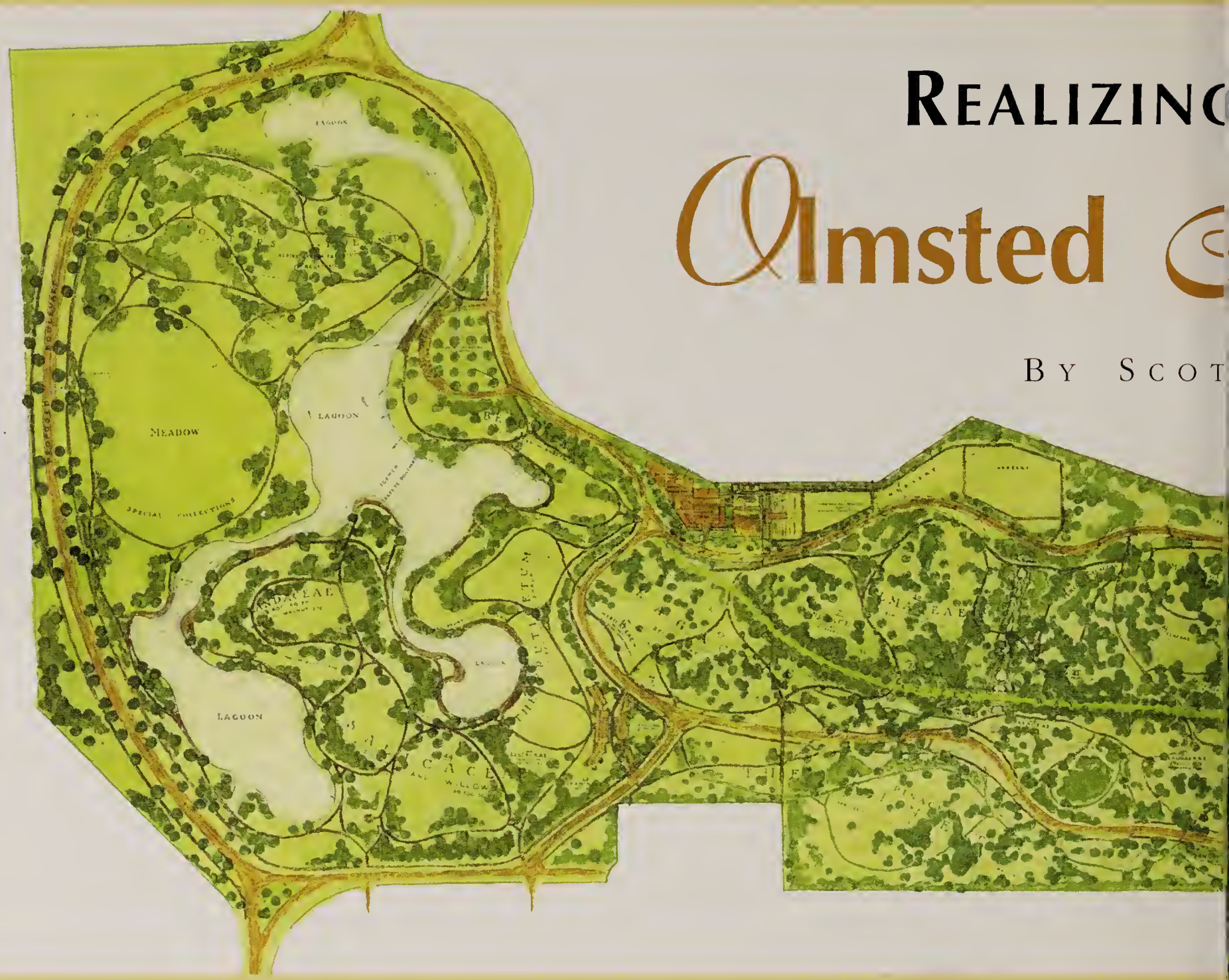
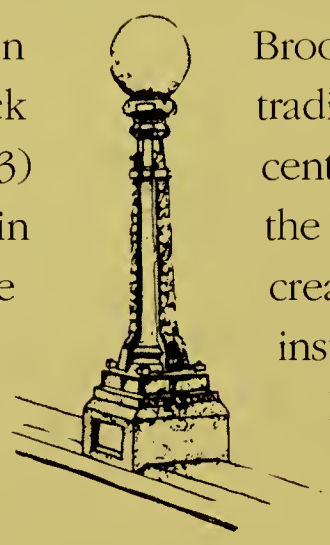


Realizing Olmsted

By Scot

The career of the American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. (1822-1903) was marked by a profound interest in environmental education through the creation of arboreta. Credited with establishing the profession of landscape architecture and renowned for his brilliant designs of some of North America's most prominent constructed landscapes, New York's Central Park among them, Olmsted's passion for the arboretum as an educational institution is less celebrated, but is, nevertheless, central to his legacy. In fact, Olmsted advocated including an arboretum on nearly every one of his projects, including many of his most notable commissions.



As the eventual successors to the senior Olmsted's practice, the Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, Massachusetts, carried the firm's tradition of arboretum design into the 20th century, producing plans for arboreta across the United States. In 1936 Olmsted Brothers created the conceptual plan for the Seattle institution known today as the Washington Park Arboretum, building upon the firm's earlier work in laying out Seattle's superb, boulevard-linked park system.

An effort to inspire learning about plants through designs that are simultaneously beautiful and scientific forms a constant in an Olmsted arboretum-design tradition that spans eight decades. The Olmsted firms were among the forerunners of modern interpretive planners, for not only did they organize the physical features of each of their arboretum sites, but also attempted to infuse these landscapes with meaning.

Seattle's Arboretum

Medbury

The General Plan for the Seattle Arboretum. Hand-colored presentation drawing, 1936.

The centennial celebration of Olmsted involvement in Seattle parks provides a good time to take stock of the Arboretum's Olmsted legacy and to explore opportunities to further realize a unique vision for a naturalistic landscape cleverly imbued with educational messages. The mission of the urban arboretum has evolved in recent decades, with new emphasis on conservation-education programs. It is no surprise that the original Olmsted vision for Seattle's arboretum is expansive enough to keep pace with a changing world.

The Road to Seattle

The Olmsted firm's approach to arboretum design combined the partners' considerable talent in landscape planning and design with the centuries-old European tradition of arranging plant collections in botanical gardens and arboreta along taxonomic lines. A taxonomic layout typically involves grouping plants into family or generic groups and then planting them along a winding pathway, so that visitors encounter species in a prescribed sequence. Historical influences on this approach include the first European botanical garden, founded at Pisa in the 1540s. The 1840 Derby Arboretum in central England, Europe's first public arboretum, subsequently set the standard for a sequential taxonomic arboretum, with an intelligent plan by garden-design trendsetter John Claudius Loudon. The Derby Arboretum strongly influenced Olmsted Sr., whose 1858 "Greensward" design for New York's Central Park included an unexecuted plan for an arboretum strikingly similar to that at Derby.

In 1874 the opportunity arose for Olmsted Sr. to collaborate on a project that quickly defined the taxonomic arboretum for North America. The influence of Boston's Arnold Arboretum on the North American institutions that followed cannot be overstated. The links with Seattle are particularly strong and include the model for a university and city partnership as well as the concept for a taxonomic layout and an adherence to naturalistic planting-design principles.

After starting on the Arnold project, Olmsted Sr. went on to prepare designs for taxonomic arboreta in New York, Vermont and at Stanford University in California; he finished his career immersed in the grand plan for the Biltmore Arboretum in North Carolina. After Olmsted Sr.'s retirement, his sons John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. carried on the firm's work, producing designs for arboreta in places, such as Philadelphia and Cleveland, in association with partners like James Frederick Dawson, lead designer on Seattle's Washington Park projects.

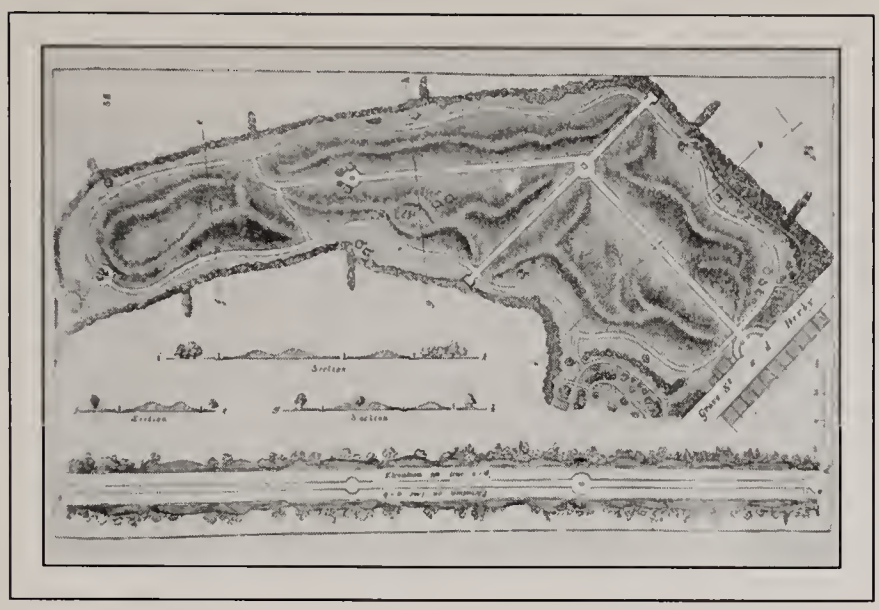
Washington Park

James Frederick Dawson's close involvement with Washington Park began in 1904 with the design for Lake Washington Boulevard. The Washington Park road segment, beginning at Madison Street and running north, was the first part of Seattle's boulevard system to be constructed and planted, and thus served as the design prototype for the rest of the system. Working under John Charles Olmsted, Dawson was able to study the conditions in the entire park while focusing his efforts on laying out a gently curving pleasure drive that followed the natural contours of the valley. Planting plans were also prepared, and subsequently were followed to varying extents as the boulevard was gradually planted in the years that followed. In addition to Lake Washington Boulevard, Olmsted and Dawson recommended several other road sections for Washington Park, including an "upper road" running parallel to the boundary with the Broadmoor golf club to the east.

Following his work on Lake Washington Boulevard, Dawson continued to maintain an active presence for Olmsted Brothers in the Puget Sound area over the next two decades, developing a fine local reputation for his work on residential properties in Seattle and Tacoma and at the campus of the state capitol in Olympia. As the movement to create an arboretum in Washington Park gathered momentum in 1934, Olmsted Brothers emerged as the obvious choice to design it. North America's most visible and well-regarded landscape firm, Olmsted Brothers could boast wide experience designing arboreta, previous experience with Seattle's arboretum site, and the prominence and prestige necessary to galvanize community support for the project. With a $3,000 gift from members of the Seattle Garden Club, the firm was contracted in the summer of 1935 to produce a preliminary general plan for the Arboretum.

Developing the Plan

Even before a design contract was signed, it is apparent that Dawson intended the Seattle arboretum's plant collections to be organized following a taxonomic scheme, and in this he undoubtedly had the support of his client. Unlike the Arnold Arboretum, however, Seattle's arboretum would be laid out using a botanical sequence that embraced an understanding of evolution. Following publication of Darwin's Origin of Species, systems of botanical taxonomy often incorporated an evolutionary sequence, beginning with species considered "primitive" and ending with those thought to be more advanced or evolved. For the Seattle project, Dawson employed the system of German botanists Engler & Prantl, which initiated the flowering-plant sequence not with the magnolias and their relatives as



Contour plan for the Derby Arboretum, 1839. The taxonomic arboretum path that winds around the periphery is concealed from the central walks by thick, evergreen shrubbery and six- to ten-foot berms. From J.C. Loudon's catalog, The Derby Arboretum, published in London, 1840.

The construction of the Arboretum in the 1930s generated frequent stories in the news media, some of them sensational. This 1936 headline shows that the idea to fence the site was quite controversial.

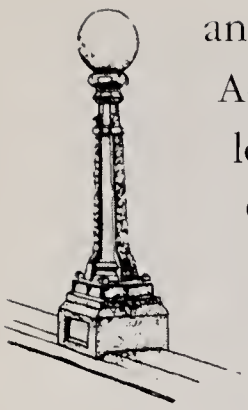
at Arnold, but with the birches, willows and alders, whose catkins and cone-like structures were thought to be more primitive.

"The General Plan for the Seattle Arboretum" arrived in Seattle in early April 1936. Striking, hand-colored graphics depicted the proposed Arboretum roads, paths, buildings and plant collections. Several of the most enduring and beloved features of the present-day Arboretum were first unveiled on this drawing, notably Azalea Way, the lagoons on the northern marshland, and Arboretum Drive, which was the "upper road" of 1904 redesigned for slower driving. Dawson was particularly proud of Azalea Way, a broad, grassy promenade of cherries, dogwoods and azaleas on the trajectory of a former skid trail and equestrian speedway. Azalea Way bisected the entire property, linking the Union Bay shoreline with a grand rose garden planned for the playfield at the Arboretum's south end. The plan also included an alpine garden in the ravine of the present Woodland Garden, a "fruticetum" or shrub collection near the marshlands, and a complex of administration buildings located near the present site of the ramps to the Evergreen Point Bridge.

The most important aspect of the plan, and the one that was to imbue it with scientific and educational purpose, was the sequential taxonomic arrangement of the plant collections. While considerable effort was made to provide sufficient space in the sections planned for particular plant families, in part through development of a comprehensive list of plants the Arboretum planned to grow, the relationship of the sequence of plant families to the pathway system is absent and forms a conceptual shortcoming in an otherwise well-conceived plan. The intent, however, was right on the mark: the Arboretum was to be a landscape supercharged with educational messages, and in this respect the design delivered famously.

Implementation

With Depression-era work crews on hand, work proceeded swiftly to implement the Olmsted plan for the Arboretum, with adjustments made as needed to respond to specific site conditions. Dredging contractors set to work creating the lagoons in the north, while a nursery and staff headquarters was developed around an existing barn in the northeastern corner of the property. Staff landscape architects Frederick Leissler and Noble Hoggson directed much of the planting on site, with local designers like Otto Holmdahl and E.A. Fabi also producing planting plans for particular sections. From the drawings that have survived, Holmdahl's design for the maple



and horse chestnut family sections (i.e. Aceraceae and Hippocastanaceae), located on the site of today's Japanese Garden, appears to have been a particularly good interpretation of Olmsted Brothers design intent. Holmdahl's design set out the trees and shrubs in these families both individually and in groups, and tied the whole scheme together with other flowering shrubs and perennials.

Removal of the playfield site from the Arboretum project required modifications to the proposed location for particular plant families, as did poor horticultural conditions or insufficient area in other cases. In 1947, Arboretum director Brian Mulligan resited 19 familes and several coniferous genera in response to these and other issues. It is important to note that the Olmsted Brothers plan was only a preliminary general plan, and that typically the firm would be invited back to develop more detailed studies. This only happened in the case of Azalea Way. In 1938, Dawson was commissioned to develop detailed planting plans for this signature feature, creating a sophisticated design that demonstrates a sensitivity to color and blooming time virtually unparalleled even today among woody plant displays. The war intervened before planting could be completed on Azalea Way, however, and the feature came to be developed gradually, with much of the subtlety of the Olmsted design lost in substitutions and reshufflings in the final planting.

Century 21

The Olmsted legacy at today's Washington Park Arboretum includes a number of important physical features first depicted on the firm's various plans for Washington Park, including roads, boulevard plantings, and the location of many plant groups. But perhaps a more important legacy relates to the firm's design philosophy, especially with reference to planting

Tours of the Arboretum, such as this late-1930s outing led by Arboretum Foundation board secretary Caroline Johnson (wearing hat, at right) helped to build community support for the project.

design, to vegetation management, and to development of a landscape devoted to learning.

One can make a strong case that the Arboretum as it exists today was largely shaped by long-time director Brian Mulligan and his staff between the years 1947 and 1972. While it is difficult to determine how much of the Arboretum's naturalistic character was influenced by the Olmsted Brothers plan and how much has resulted from Mulligan's British horticultural training, the overall result is in keeping with what is generally considered to be "Olmstedian" throughout the country. Curiously, one of the biggest threats to this landscape's character has been the unchecked growth of native big-leaf maple and red cedar. These trees, intended by Dawson to be gradually thinned out as plantations matured, have out-competed and suppressed collection trees in some places. The character of woodland landscapes identified with Olmsted firm designs are no accident but are the result of ongoing and intelligent vegetation management.

The Olmsted vision for Seattle's arboretum was not simply one for a thickly planted sanctuary in the city, but for the creation of an educational institution devoted to horticultural and botanical display. Unfortunately, like its West Coast peers in Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles, the Washington Park Arboretum has never commanded the financial resources

COURTESY NPS FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Olmsted Brothers' plan located the rose family on the playfield site at the Arboretum's south end, and provided for a rose garden on the flat land and a collection of flowering cherries, plums and crabapples on adjacent slopes. Here, a WPA work-relief team grades terraces by hand on the south slope of the playfield, prior to the removal of this parcel from the Arboretum project in 1936.

necessary to fully realize its educational and interpretive potential. Taking inspiration from a longstanding tradition of naturalistic planting design, the challenge in Seattle is to continue to enhance the richness of the plant collections, to integrate sensitively disparate hardscape elements, and to develop appropriately scaled and exquisitely sited facilities to maintain and interpret Seattle's special "tree place."

A growing thing, an arboretum is never static. Realizing the vision for Seattle's Olmsted arboretum requires a look to the future as much as to the past. In this effort, too, the Olmsted legacy is a guiding light. An eminently practical man, Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. would be among the first to recommend adapting to changing circumstances.

Fifth-generation Seattleite Scot Medbury is the director of Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Gardens and the Conservatory of Flowers in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. A 1990 graduate of the Center for Urban Horticulture, Scot's M.S. thesis was the first study to analyze the origins and development of the Olmsted Brothers' 1936 plan for Washington Park Arboretum.

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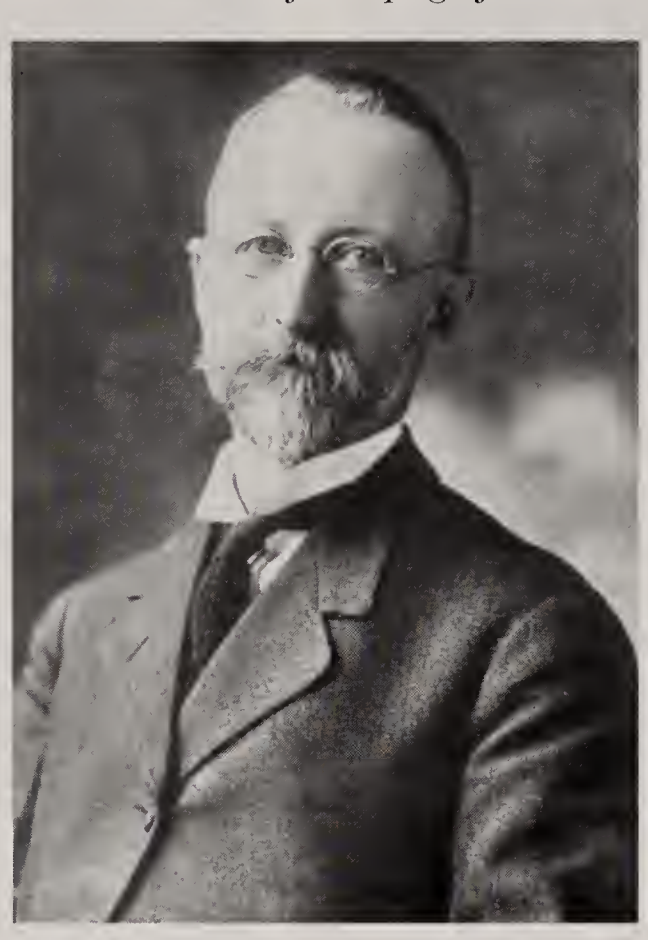
What do you know about FLO?

continued from page five

always piquing their interest in what lay around the next corner.

His self-designed education abroad was the inspiration FLO needed for his first big task—New York City's Central Park—the real beginning of his landscape architecture career. (He never considered himself a landscape gardener, a title Downing and others used up until then.) FLO went into the Central Park project through the back door, taking on the job of superintendent in charge of the work crew and police force in the late summer of 1857. This positioned him well when the competition for the design of the park was launched. Olmsted—along with Calvert Vaux, who became his partner—won with their creation of a public space they called Greensward. The on-again-off-again relationship Olmsted had with New York City and those who oversaw his work at Central Park is the stuff of soap operas.



From 1903 until his death in 1920, John Charles Olmsted was the principal landscape architect for Olmsted Brothers' efforts in Seattle.

COURTESY NPS FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Olmsted's Sons

Much of the work of the firm of Olmsted Brothers, which included John, Frederick Jr. and their partner Charles Eliot, was grounded in what Frederick Law Olmsted had taught them and the ideas to which he had exposed them. By the middle of 1875, John was in business with his father, starting as an assistant. Although FLO brought up John Charles as his own son, John was actually the son of John Hull Olmsted, FLO's brother. J. H. Olmsted died of tuberculosis in late 1857, when his son was five years old, and FLO's subsequent marriage to his brother's widow, Mary, took place a year and a half later. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was born 11 years after they were married.

FLO sent John off on his own tour of Birkenhead and Hyde parks and important European public spaces. In the lapse of years these parks and plantings had aged; FLO knew it was important to observe how they had aged in order to plan for change. The passage of time is nowhere more evident than in the garden. Plants grow, trees age, and the character of a planting, long sought and carefully planned, can peak and eventually become something that was never intended. FLO sent John to Europe with specific instructions to observe how the parks, such as Birkenhead, were being renovated, to see what was being replanted and how age was being accommodated.

Rick went to Harvard, trained for the profession of landscape architect and worked on the Biltmore Estate as an assistant. His father demanded that Rick learn more about plants than anyone else in the

firm, certainly more than FLO himself, as he believed that his limited knowledge of plants was his downfall. He quashed his son's rebelliousness, and Rick proceeded with his education in botany.

It is encouraging to note that although FLO began the profession of landscape architecture in America, and is the most notable landscape architect since its beginnings in this country, he probably had as many failures as successes. Yet that did not deter him, nor dampen the memory of the body of his work. For every successful Brooklyn park there is a Stanford University, where he labored to create a landscape he believed matched the natural surroundings, but which was cast aside by Leland and Jane Stanford, parents who wanted to build a monument to their deceased son. There was the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, in 1893, a remarkable showcase for the design of parks and buildings, and then there was the plan for the city of Tacoma, over which the railroad magnates, who had commissioned Olmsted's work, shook their heads in disbelief.

In later years it could be said that this Northwest slight was more than remedied when Olmsted's sons' firm was invited to plan both public parks and private gardens in the Northwest, work still celebrated today. ~

Marty Wingate is a freelance garden writer whose weekly column appears in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Her first book, "Big Ideas for Northwest Small Gardens," has just been published by Sasquatch Books.

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"My Dear Wife,"

By Joan Hockaday

As Seattle's parks came off the Olmsted drawing board practically one a day almost a century ago, letters back home also came off the fountain pen of distinguished park planner John C. Olmsted—one a day, without fail.

"My Dear Wife," each letter began on crisp Rainier Club stationery, ending almost always, "Ever your loving husband." The letters—two to four pages each—reveal more about Seattle's early landscape, characters, buildings and bravado than all the official reports filed in city archives.

Here then are excerpts from one loving husband in Seattle to one waiting wife near Boston, apart for months at a time over the years when Seattle's parks, neighborhoods and boulevards took shape in the sketchbooks of John C. Olmsted:

On the University of Washington campus:

"My Dear Wife, . . . After lunch I went out to the University grounds and walked over the part the [1909 Alaska Yukon Pacific] exposition is to occupy. The growth on the ground is so dense I could not see much. The land has never been cleared up. Most of the original timber was cut, then there were fires but there

BELOW: This view across the south campus toward Mt. Rainier shows the Olmsted design for the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. With Professor Meany's original arboretum swept away by the Expo aftermath, a new arboretum was created by the Olmsted firm, under the treetops beyond, at Washington Park in the 1930s.

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF SEATTLE'S OLMSTED PARKS.

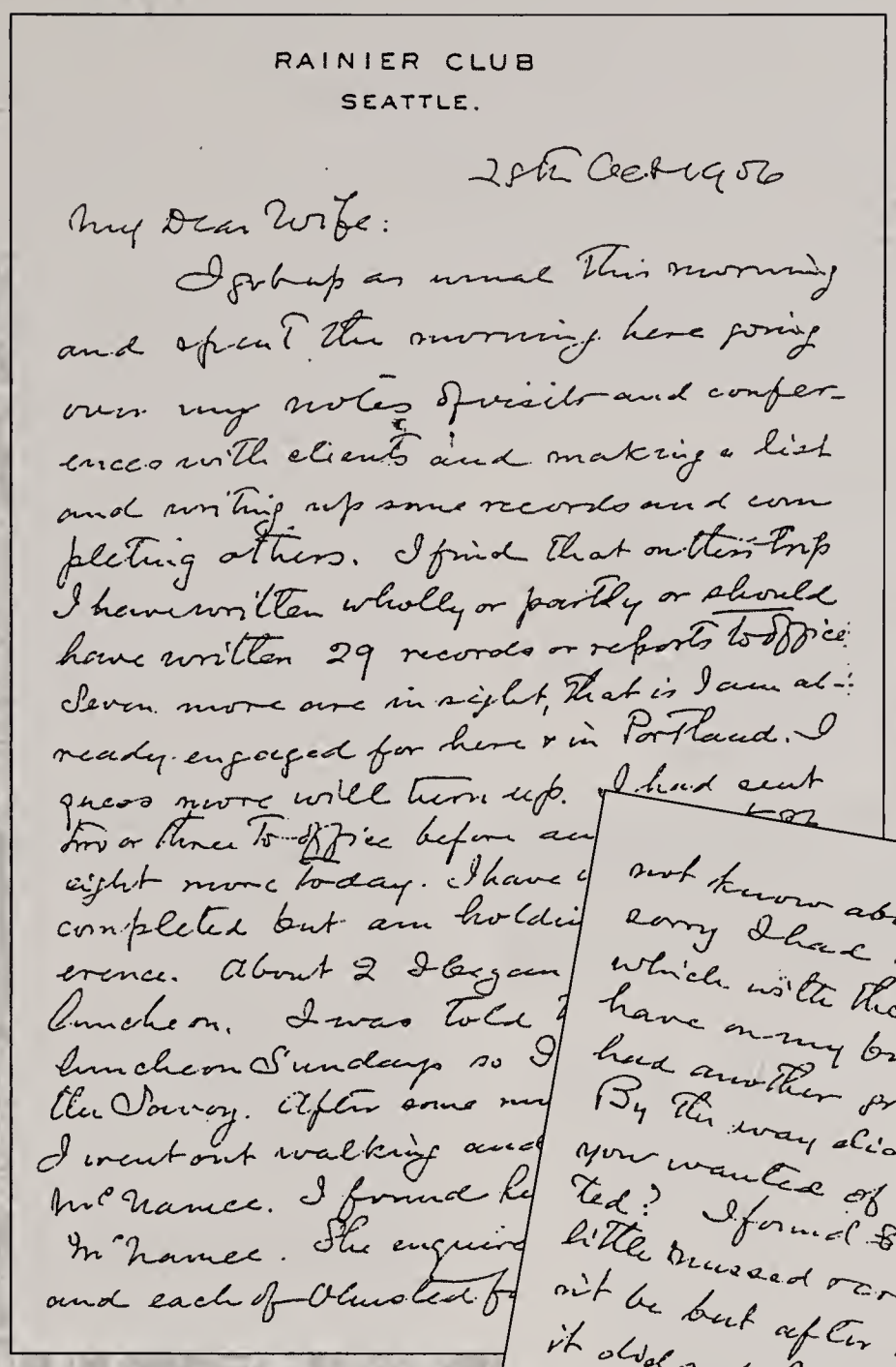
are still some groves and scattering fir trees left…3' to 4' diameter …what remain look like the very biggest we ever had in Maine. They are tall and straight and would make fine masts. . . . Ever your loving husband," 20th October 1906.

No mention in that letter of Professor Edmund S. Meany's earlier attempt at an arboretum on campus, tended personally and eventually swept away under the exposition site. But in a mysterious entry the week before, Olmsted wrote:

"My Dear Wife, . . . There is naturally a good deal of interest in the plan of the exposition, especially on the part of local real estate speculators. One of the professors of the university, part of whose land is to be used for the exposition, called and gave me the benefit of his ideas. . . . Ever your loving husband," 17th October 1906

About Mt. Rainier, he wrote,"My Dear Wife,…When I was waiting for the [electric] car [around Green Lake] I saw Mt. Rainier very distinctly particularly with my 'Feldachtecker'—field glass. It is tremendous and being covered with snow looks at first like a cloud, on a clear day like today with the sun low in the west striking it. It certainly is a grand sight. I wish I could have seen it yesterday from the centre of the Exposition grounds. . . . Ever your loving husband," 21st October 1906

On our native Northwest plants: "My Dear Wife, . . . The climate is so damp that everything grows luxuriantly. Brake ferns are higher than my head. The Sallal rattles like starched linen when one walks through it. It is a low evergreen bush with big wide leaves—very handsome dark green but usually rather sprawly. Maybe in a garden where it had room it would make a handsome plant. It is handsomer than the mahonia. . . .

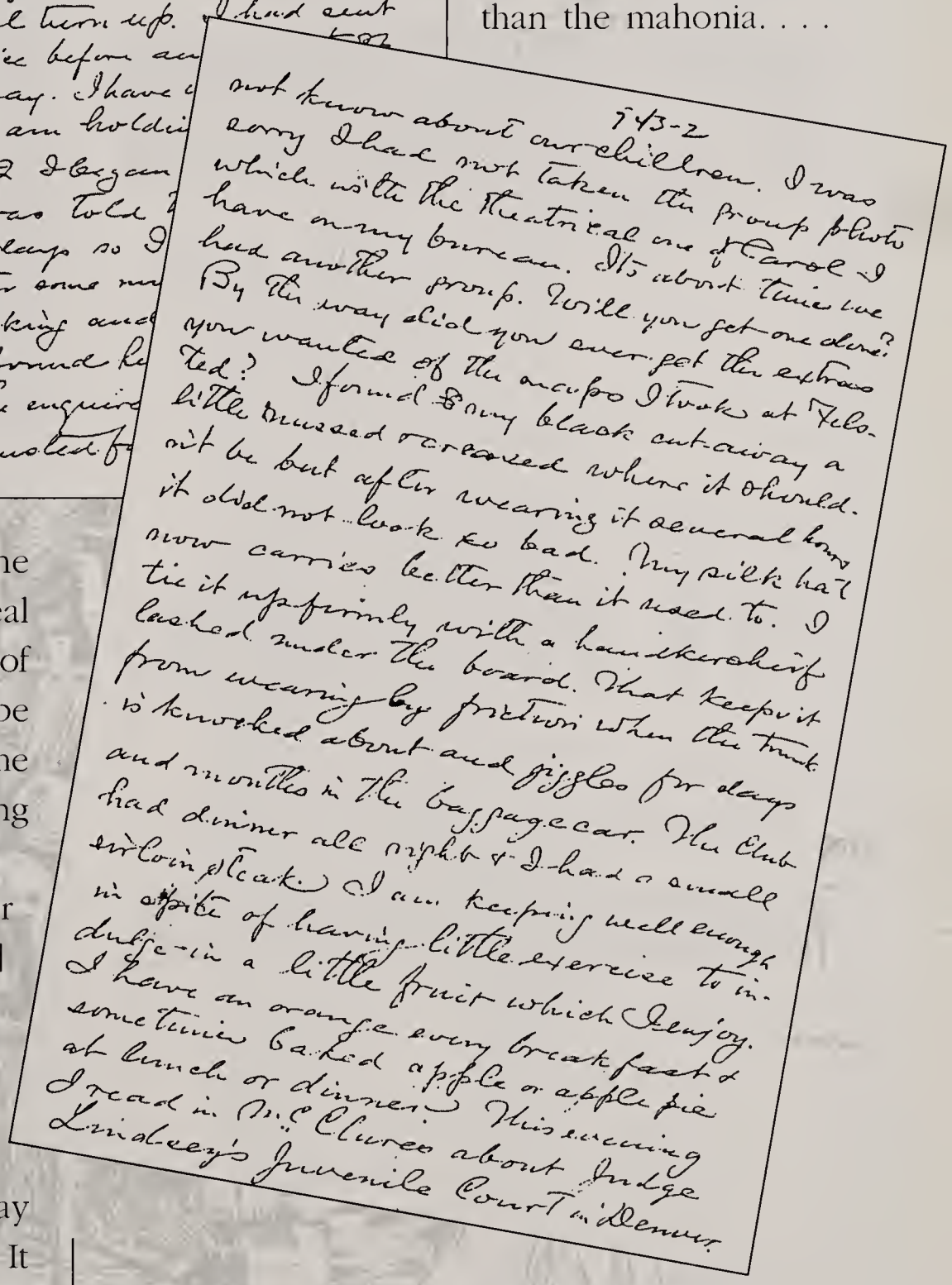


RAINIER CLUB
SEATTLE.

28th Oct 1906

My Dear Wife:

I got up as usual this morning and spent the morning here going over my notes of visits and conferences with clients and making a list and writing up some records and completing others. I find that on this trip I have written wholly or partly or should have written 29 records or reports to office. Seven more are in sight, that is I am already engaged for here & in Portland. I guess more will turn up. I had sent two or three to office before an[illegible] sight more today. I have [illegible] completed but am holdi[illegible] erence. About 2 I began [illegible] luncheon. I was told [illegible] luncheon Sundays so I [illegible] the Savoy. After some m[illegible] I went out walking and [illegible] McNamee. I found he[illegible] McNamee. The enquire[illegible] and each of Olmsted f[illegible]



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not know about our children. I was sorry I had not taken the group photo which with the theatrical one of Carol I have on my bureau. Its about time we had another group. Will you get one done? By the way did you ever get the extras you wanted of the maps I took at Felsted? I found my black cut away a little mussed & creased where it should not be but after wearing it several hours it did not look so bad. My silk hat now carries better than it used to. I tie it up firmly with a handkerchief lashed under the board. That keeps it from wearing by friction when the trunk is knocked about and jiggles for days and months in the baggage car. The Club had dinner all right & I had a small sirloin steak. I am keeping well enough in spite of having little exercise to indulge in a little fruit which I enjoy. I have an orange every breakfast & sometimes baked apple or apple pie at lunch or dinner. This evening I read in McClure's about Judge Lindsey's Juvenile Court in Denver.

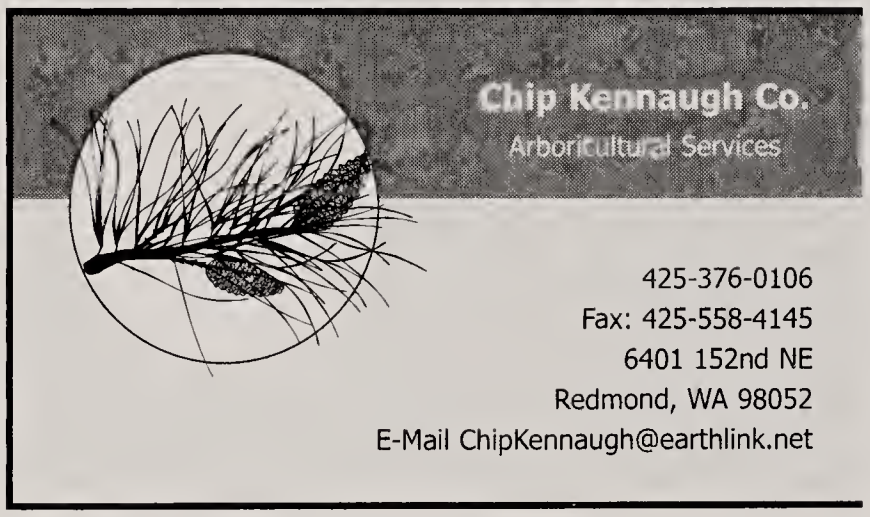
The alders are pretty trees & I saw some near the boat house with tall straight smooth trunks like forest beech trees about 16 or 18 inches diameter. . . . I feel a little tired from my walk but am glad I got some exercise. . . . Ever your loving husband," 20th October 1906

On Seattle's weather: "My Dear Wife, . . . Thanksgiving Day! . . . The winter here is very much less trying than at Boston. The temperature is remarkably uniform and seldom goes quite down to freezing. It is dull and damp and often rainy but one gets used to that. Today has been sunny and pleasant though foggy early. Ever your loving husband," 29th November 1906

"My Dear Wife, . . . Another fine day! This is the season of fine weather here. . . . Ever your loving husband," 2nd June 1907

Background screen, courtesy of the Rainier Club, Seattle. John Olmsted's letters, courtesy of Loeb Library, Harvard University and Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks, with special thanks to Jerry Arbes and Anne Knight. Excerpts are published here with their original punctuation and capitalization."

Joan Hockaday is on the Bulletin's editorial board and is author of "The Gardens of San Francisco," Timber Press, 1988, now out of print.



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RENEWING THE WASHINGTON PARK ARBORETUM

From Taxonomy to Ecology

BY JOHN A. WOTT, DIRECTOR

The Olmsted Brothers' plan for the Arboretum, designed by James Dawson, focused on an orderly system of taxonomic hierarchy, emphasizing plant families over individual species. This was the accepted norm of the day. It considered neither the number of taxa (different plants) within a species that could grow successfully in the Northwest, nor the horticultural requirements of individual plants.

Fortunately, long-time Director Brian O. Mulligan knew that plants should be planted where they thrive best: in sun or shade, wet or dry soil, etc. And for 25 years Mulligan directed the Arboretum's planting based upon cultural requirements, keeping an eye on the Olmsted Brothers' plan whenever possible.

Just as civilization often builds new layers over the old, so will the new master plan, "Renewing Washington Park Arboretum," bring new focus and emphasis to the way plant collections are laid out. Sixty-five years after James Dawson drew his plan, the site has been greatly altered by the growth of so many large trees. In addition, the use of public gardens by thousands of visitors is now perceived in a different way. By redesigning collections to be more aesthetically pleasing, the Arboretum could attain more of the feeling the Olmsted firm originally envisioned.

The new plan will restructure "the collections of woody plants and woody plant communities around ecological themes which identify the site's principal landforms and define their horticultural and educational meanings." These ecological themes will replace the original plan's collections/display

scheme with an evolutionary sequence of taxonomic groups. The teaching of ecological relationships is replacing taxonomic classification as the preferred model in science education today. Therefore, it is appropriate that ecology succeed taxonomy as the guiding collections/display theme in the Arboretum. One wonders what Frederick Law Olmsted himself would do if he were suddenly thrust into today's world of ecological and conservation issues.

Temperate Forest Formations

Additionally, the new plan will focus on the broader theme of the temperate forests of the world and all the relationships among the organisms that comprise them. Emphasizing the similarities and differences among the world's temperate forests is a powerful way to interest visitors in local, as well as global, issues. It can also encourage them to think about their own garden in a larger ecological context.

The new plan is unique in that by using a central ecological theme to organize the core collections of specimen woody plants and woody plant communities, we can use significant existing specimens within future collection and exhibit development.

The Arboretum site is easily divided into three zones representing geomorphic and hydrologic landforms: the forested ridge, the valley bottom, and the marsh. The master plan identifies specific collections of woody plants, woody plant communities, as well as remnant native communities, within each of these zones.

According to the plan, "The forested ridge and valley bottom landforms are divided into areas representing the world's temperate forest-formation types, using a simplified world-vegetation scheme. ..." There are four forest formations appropriate for Seattle: coniferous forest; deciduous/broadleaf forest; mixed coniferous/broadleaf forest; and cool Mediterranean scrub forest.

As we walk south from the Woodland Garden, we currently see the mixed, coniferous/broadleaf forest formation type alternating with coniferous forest. The walk terminates with a Mediterranean scrub forest representation at the southern reach of the slope near the existing Rock Garden along Lake Washington Boulevard. The deciduous/broadleaf forest formation type embraces most of the valley bottom.

Native Tapestry

A native forest tapestry will weave among the forest formations as well as other exhibits. In some cases it will serve only as an overstory or background for non-native specimens. In other instances it will be underplanted with native shrubs and groundcovers in order to simulate various Pacific Northwest plant associations. This will require management, and sometimes alteration, of the species composition. We ultimately envision a matrix of managed native forest, representing several successional stages.

Core Collections

Previous articles in this series have discussed the core collections, i.e., those groups of plants essential for maintaining a strong taxonomic emphasis. But it should be noted that the world forest-formation scheme will serve as the guide for adding and changing the core collections. The horticultural staff will need to take into consideration the placement, including soil, slope and drainage, as well as the horticultural performance of existing specimens when choosing the location of a plant not intended for a specific exhibit.

Exhibiting the World Forest

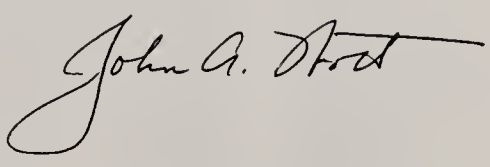
In order for visitors more easily to see and understand the concept of world forests, we will need to develop and showcase specific areas of each forest type. These four areas primarily will be based upon existing collections. "Within each of the four forest formation types, it will be possible to create or maintain taxonomic and geographic themes. Plants in the same genus or family—or plants from a specific geographic region—may be clustered together for interpretive reasons within a particular forest formation." The suggested locations of the four interpretive areas are:

Coniferous forest: Geographic distribution and economic importance will be interpreted at Sequoia Summit, the location of the large redwoods, which will place more emphasis on conifer diversity.

Mixed coniferous/broadleaf forest: Interpretation will be located in the central portion of the Arboretum, near the new point called Restoration Ridge. It will be reached easily by all trails. This area is already well on its way to becoming entirely of this kind of mix.

Deciduous/broadleaf forest: This will be interpreted all along Arboretum Creek and the proposed Forest Trail along the west edge of the Arboretum. The site lends itself fully to this type of vegetation.

Mediterranean scrub forest: The entire hillside at the Arboretum's south end is dry and has more sandy soil than other parts of the Arboretum. Mediterranean scrub forest will be interpreted near the ecological and ecogeographical exhibits of Madrona Terrance.



John A. Wott, Director,
Washington Park Arboretum

WASHINGTON PARK ARBORETUM

A Photographer's Paradise

The Arboretum Foundation and the Bulletin present an Arboretum Photo Contest

Professional and amateur photographers are encouraged to submit photos in five categories:

- Plant Portraits
- Landscapes
- Seasons
- Life in the Arboretum
- Japanese Garden

Winning photos will be published in the Bulletin and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer next year. All competing photos will be displayed in the Graham Visitors Center at a special reception in April 2004. Photos must be received by March 1, 2004.

For complete guidelines and a list of prizes, call (206) 325-4510 or e-mail gvc@arboretumfoundation.org.

Presented by the Arboretum Foundation, with support from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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ILLUSTRATION BY JENNA RIGGS

Frederick Law Olmsted—Clearing the Way for American Landscape Architecture

By Brian Thompson

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) is widely regarded as this country's first prominent landscape architect and is responsible for the establishment of the profession in North America.

What type of man lies behind this rather bookish recognition? One who lived a surprisingly varied life, with none of the expected training, and through his first 35 years, at least, one who showed little possibility of such promise. Olmsted's path followed many twists and turns of both adventure and fortune, creating a life story that paints an intriguing glimpse of mid- to late-19th century American culture and values.

A sea voyage to China, long journeys as a reporter through the pre-Civil War south, managing a mine on the frontier edge of the California gold rush and walking the breadth of England—these were only a few of his adventures. Writer, farmer and general secretary of the largest volunteer relief organization during the Civil War—these were a few of his many career paths.

Two biographies, widely spaced in their writing, provide excellent accounts of these events, as well as those establishing Olmsted's reputation as a landscape architect. "FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted" by Laura Wood Roper was first published in 1973. "A Clearing in the Distance" by Witold Rybczynski appeared in 1999. Both are still in print (the Roper work in a 1983 paperback edition).

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF SEATTLE'S OLMSTED PARKS.

The Central Park design, created by Olmsted Sr. and Calvert Vaux in 1858 included a quarter mile-long mall intended to be a "grand promenade" for strolling, music and concerts.

Why would a gardener be interested in these books? First, they are well written and include much good storytelling. Second, they offer insight into both the art and science of landscape architecture. No, you won't learn how to design a formal border. In fact, Olmsted disdained flower gardens. But you will appreciate the skill required to use nature artfully and to articulate the impact of landscape on daily life.

You will also learn this is no job for wimps. Olmsted was, by necessity, tenacious. Although famous in his own day, rarely were his ideas accepted without reservation. Some of the most interesting reading recounts the long process of political intrigue, triumph and reversal, compromise and finally dismissal after some 15 years of working on New York's Central Park.

"The necessary elements of the scenery he loved and created were cheerfulness, grace, repose, a touch of mystery, to buoy and stimulate the spirit. . . ."

While Central Park is Olmsted's best known achievement, his work stretched across the country and included an 1873 plan for the then new city of Tacoma created for the Northern Pacific Railway. Rybczynski describes Olmsted's plan for the hilly site as "an elegant solution." However, "the railroad directors would have none of it. They found themselves a surveyor who laid out a simple grid."

Underlying all of his work and travels was a developing sense of the meaning of landscape. This was perhaps most tested upon his arrival in Bear Valley, California, where, for two years, he managed one of the largest gold mines in the state. Raised in New England, he did not immediately appreciate arid, brown hills.

While this viewpoint changed, especially with his later visit to Yosemite, Roper observes, "He was not, however, then or ever converted from his established standard of landscape beauty. The necessary elements of the scenery he loved and created were cheerfulness, grace, repose, a touch of mystery, to buoy and stimulate the spirit, not grandeur to paralyze the mind with a sense of its own inconsequence."

Reading two biographies of the same subject simultaneously was a new experience for me—one I found very rewarding. Both writers have an easy style that belies the intensive scholarship underlying their works, and both tuck away, unobtrusively, at the end, their numerous footnotes. Olmsted had many significant contacts in both his work and personal life; reading two sources simultaneously helped me keep track of everyone.

Rybczynski provides a very personal approach, interjecting into the narrative his own reactions: "And now, I feel myself becoming impatient with Olmsted. Why can't he just get on with it?" He shares his reactions to visits of surviving projects, such Brooklyn's Prospect Park or Montreal's Mount Royal, and of places where Olmsted lived, such as Bear Valley, which "had not prospered" in the subsequent 130 years.

He also creates imaginative vignettes, stepping away from the narrative to provide a snapshot of a moment in Olmsted's life and the lives of associates, friends or family members. "The Narrows, New York; Thursday, June 20, 1867...Olmsted, in shirtsleeves, is sitting in the stern munching an apple. His lean face is deeply tanned from days spent outside, supervising work on the park. John, a sturdy boy with the delicate features of his father, is rowing. His brother Owen, a chubby nine-year-old, is curled up in the bow, sound asleep."

Roper is less inclined to step out of her role as researcher and reporter. Her work is described by Rybczynski as "a model of the scholarly biography" and reflects research that stretched over 20 years—far enough back that she had invaluable personal interviews with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957), who was a noted landscape architect himself and champion of his father's work.

Most remarkable is Roper's crafting all her research and interviews into a style that suggests she is writing a letter to a good friend. While always the observer, her wry comments eloquently express her opinions about Olmsted's personality and those of the people with whom he was associated. She gives a more complete picture of Mary

Olmsted, who was, first, the wife of Frederick's beloved brother John Hull. Following her husband's death, she married Frederick, bringing not only three stepchildren to Olmsted's life, but also having immeasurable influence on his career.

Both of these biographies are worth reading, but if needing to choose, I would start with "A Clearing in the Distance." The integration of contemporary and modern perspectives with creative vignettes is an effective way to describe Olmsted's era to readers living more than a century later. If this work proves satisfying, then by all means continue with "FLO" for a subtle but distinct viewpoint and greater detail of many of Olmsted's adventures, projects and opinions.

Both authors are adept at illustrating the qualities in Olmsted that contributed to his success and define his profession: the ability to form a long range vision and to live with it through scrutiny and compromise to conclusion, or to know when to cut one's losses and move on to the next project. As Roper summarizes, "Nothing in Olmsted's correspondence suggests that such failures of influence made him lose heart or doubt the eventual effectiveness of his work." This optimism, as much as the landscapes he left us, may be what makes the life of Frederick Law Olmsted so appealing. ~

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Brian Thompson is a librarian at the Elisabeth C. Miller Horticultural Library.

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